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## SOME SUPERSTITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF FILIPINO FARMERS

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No occupation of man has produced a richer store of traditions, customs, and superstitions than agriculture. The daily life and work of the farmer bring him in a peculiarly close relationship with the forces of nature. If he dwells in the darkness of ignorance in regions where the early morning light of civilization is just appearing, the poor farmer regards the productive agents of nature with awe. In the performance of his daily tasks a superstitious fear haunts him. The soil he tills, the seed he sows have hidden, mysterious forces; the air is filled with invisible beings, waiting, watching, ready with their supernatural gifts to bless with plenty or curse with want. The sun, the moon, the stars, the thunder, the lightning, the wind, the rain, are but manifestations of an all-controlling, relentless power. This fear, ever-present in the soul of the farmer leads him to practice many propitiatory rites and ceremonies. Ignorant of nature's laws, he knows no other way to gain the goodwill of the all-powerful forces on which he depends for his daily food.

The Filipino farmer, after nearly four hundred years of nominal contact with European civilization, is most superstitious, and in his planting and harvesting is a devout believer in the efficacy of all manner of conciliatory ceremonies. There is something altogether delightful in the childlikeness, the simplicity of many of these traditional rites.

As rice is and has been the chief means of subsistence in the Philippines so far back that the origin of its use is lost in the mazes of tradition, about this crop gather the greatest number and the most sacred of the Filipino superstitions. Though communities differ somewhat in the per-

formance of the rites, there is a resemblance that reveals their common origin or source. The few customs here given connected with culture of rice and other products are fairly representative of the beliefs and practices of the Christian Filipino farmers in different parts of the island of Luzon and the Visayan islands where the major portion of the five most important civilized tribes live.

The reason the farmer does not plow the soil deep is that the roots of the plants are afraid of total darkness.

While threshing the rice for seed by stamping it out with the feet, the worker may touch a rope, vine, or any body free to move, but he must not touch a fixed object as a post, tree or wall. Should he do this the stalks of rice grown from the seeds will be short and small. The straw from which the seed is threshed must not be burnt or the plants which grow from the seed will not be strong and vigorous.

During the seed-time farmers must not cut their hair or shave or eat salt fish. If they do any one of these things the stalks of rice will grow short.

When the farmer sows the rice in the seed-bed he must be alone so that if locusts or other insect pests come to destroy the crop they will not come in large numbers.

The strange blending of pagan and Christian practices and beliefs that can always be traced in the process of Christianizing a pagan people is apparent in many of the customs and superstitions of the Filipino farmers. The flowers used at Easter time or at other special church services are gathered up carefully by the farmers and carried home and broken up and mixed with rice seed before it is sown in the seed-bed. Grains for seed are often taken to the church on Corpus Christi Day to receive the blessing of the priest and be sprinkled with the holy water.

Whether the farmer is to plant rice seed in the seed-bed or to sow it broadcast for upland rice, he must eat a very hearty meal before beginning his work. This is done so that the grains of his crop will be good big full grains. Before he begins to sow, the farmer removes his salakot, or broad mushroom-shaped hat as a mark of solemn respect to the powers that control the harvest. In some localities uncover-

ing the head is interpreted to be in reverence to San Isidro, the patron saint of the farmer. As he sows, the farmer must be sure to close his eyes, for if he cannot see, neither will the birds and rats and mice be able to see where the seeds are. Ashes or bits of charcoal are scattered over the ground to blind in some way the eyes of insects and birds and also the evil spirits so they cannot see the grains. In all probability this was a scheme of the good *padres* to secure some fertilization of the fields by the farmers.

In broadcasting rice a bountiful harvest will be assured if the sowing be begun the day after a night when the sky is full of stars. Upland rice should be sown at high tide. If the farmer lives too far inland to note the ebb and flow of the tides, he tells by the eyes of a cat. When the tide is high the cat's eyes expand, when it is low tide they contract.

For four days after the sowing of rice no member of the family shall sweep the house or the yard about the house. Nor shall any one in the family sharpen a knife or any metal implement. If these things are done the harvest will be light and the grain of poor quality.

If a stick is used to make holes in which to plant rice seed (this method is used on newly-cleared land) the farmer splits the end of the stick used as a handle into many parts like a brush. This will cause the cereal to have large bushy heads.

When the lowland, or paddy rice is to be transplanted from the seed-bed to the field, almost as much time, certainly more mental energy, is consumed in the ceremonies required to secure the crop from the depredations of pests and spirits, as in the work of actual planting. The rites are a queer mix-up of paganism and Christianity. If the carabao, which pulls through the muck the one handled light wooden implement that answers for a plow, should lie down while plowing the land for planting it is looked upon as a most favorable sign from the powers. Exceedingly lucky is the farmer who can secure a specially marked carabao with which to plow a furrow around the whole field. For an animal so favored of the spirits extra hire is paid.

A few days before transplanting begins a platform is built in the field. On this platform as an offering to the spirits a sack filled with seed-rice is placed. Around the sack are laid cooked fish, buyo, wine, and toys. For three days and nights no one goes near this propitiatory sacrifice. At the end of this time the farmer inspects it. If he finds that any of the articles have been taken he is filled with hope and goes on with his planting with a good heart, for he knows that the spirits are satisfied with his offering and will not disturb his crop. If nothing has been taken he is wholly despondent and may go no further with his planting, feeling confident that his labor would be for naught, as the spirits of the air are still angry and he is helpless, his utmost has been done to appease them.

The spirits are frightened away in some localities by placing a cross made of bamboo in the field. At the foot of the cross onions, garlic, and ginger are put very early in the morning before the birds are awake. Just what the vegetables are for is rather obscure but the custom is rigidly followed by many when the cross is used. They evidently consider the cross powerless unless supported by these particular edibles.

The day transplanting begins, one man, preferably the farmer, plants one row of seedlings around the field, repeating prayers as he works. The same man will run rapidly across the field so that his helpers in the transplanting will work with speed.

Planting should begin very early in the morning so animals will not see the workers. Apparently it makes no difference about being seen after the work is begun. Animals and spirits of the air seem to be more or less mixed together as evils to be averted by secrecy.

Transplanting should be done in the full of the moon and if possible on cloudy days; this helps to secure abundance of rainfall during the growing of the crop.

While transplanting the rice the worker must be very careful not to sit or bend his knees, lest the stalks of the grain grow crooked. He must never, during transplanting time, sit on a log to rest or monkeys will come and destroy his crop,

for a man sitting on a log bears, in position of body, some resemblance to a monkey.

Even the farmer's children must do their little part. After the planting is finished they must not run and play until four or five days have passed. Should they indulge in such recreation during these days the rats and mice in imitation of them would run and play over the field. Not only in sacrifice of pleasure do the little brown tots render aid in rice raising; they unconsciously act as augurs, oracles interpreting the will of the spirits. Should the children, before planting begins, play much with sand it is an omen of a good crop; just the reverse should they amuse themselves with hulls or husks of rice. Kite flying is an infallible sign of a harvest of small imperfectly filled grains, while by the children spinning tops the spirits promise a good harvest of full plump grains.

Hanging heavy heads of rice on sticks driven in different parts of the field is considered an efficient means of securing an abundant yield.

After the rice crop is planted, many things must be done to protect it from harm during the growing period. Bamboo branches stuck in the corners and in other parts of the upland rice field are believed effective in scaring away the spirits. The disheartening locust pest before which science and inventive ingenuity stand helpless, the Filipino farmer combats by burying some locusts in many parts of the field before transplanting the rice and also by catching some of the first locusts seen and eating them. That this last act will cause the swarm to move on is the faith that impels it. Through the latter superstition John the Baptist's special brand of food may have come into its present popular use as a sweetmeat in Filipino households.

If the destructive monkeys, another pest in the Philippines, menace the crop, a sure way to get rid of them is to catch one and skin it, then turn it loose. The companions of the flayed simian will disappear.

Rats are also an enemy that the farmer must fight. It is perfectly useless to kill them; this method only, in some unexplainable way adds to their number. On the whole,

the Filipino farmer deems it best to win the good will of this family of gnawing rodents, so he never scolds them or speaks to or of them except in terms of politeness. It is "Señor Rat" around the rice-field.

In some communities after the rice is planted the farmer goes over the field entreating the spirits in loud wailing tones to give him a good crop. As he implores he distributes in craftily chosen places a bribe in the form of a sweetmeat made of rice, sugar, and coconut. The use of San Nicolas bread is also widely practiced. This is a rice or flour bread cooked in a special way and blessed by the priest. It is usually given on September 10, San Nicolas Day, to the farmers who take it home, break it into small bits and scatter the pieces over the rice field. It is believed to be particularly effective in protecting the rice from blight and insect pest. Sometimes the bread is put inside a bamboo cross which is placed in the field.

It is most important that transplanting be begun on Mondays, Wednesdays, or Saturdays. This last day is an especially good day, as it is believed that at one time it was a sacred day, so a special blessing attends work begun on that day, whether it be planting or harvesting. The other four days of the week are dangerous days on which to begin work. To work on Sundays or holidays will inevitably bring failure of crop. Filipino farmers never work on the anniversaries of great calamities; to do so will surely cause the return of the misfortune.

In all countries the harvest season is attended with more ceremony, usually, than the planting season. Whether the people be pagan or Christian, the reaping-time observances are of the nature of a religious thanksgiving for the gifts of the soil, a rejoicing because of the returns for the farmer's labor. So it is in the Philippines. Only here at the beginning of the harvest, at the reaping of the first grains, the good will of the spirits that hover about controlling the golden fields must be gained. There seems to be a fear that these omnipotent beings may not permit the ripened grain to be garnered.

The farmer keeps in mind the next planting and before beginning to reap cuts the rice for seed. He does not fail to remember the value of good well-filled seed-grains, so the fattest man in the family always gathers the rice for seed. This personage must have will-power as well as adipose tissue for he must keep silent while gathering the grain and for two hours after he has brought it to the house. This silence is necessary to insure germination.

A bundle of rice of the last crop is left in the granary to welcome the new rice. In some mysterious way this welcoming bundle makes the supply of new rice last, something after the manner of the good widow's handful of meal that fed the Prophet Elijah.

To prevent failure of the next crop and as an expression of gratitude to the Giver of harvests a bundle of rice is taken to the church the day before harvesting begins. Some farmers, the day before commencing to cut the grain, walk around each paddy, or field, and make the sign of the cross at the corners. Offerings of various kinds, as specially prepared candy, are placed in the field for the spirits and the night before reaping proper is begun chickens with white feathers are killed and cooked and placed in the fields that are awaiting the sickle.

The "kitdul," or ceremony of the cutting of the first grain has a dramatic flavor, a primitive dignity. Very strict rules govern this rite. The cutting must be done by the farmer very early on Saturday morning. On the way to the field he must not look to the right nor to the left but straight ahead. Selecting the "first rice heads" the farmer raises his knife to the proper reaping position and repeats the Lord's Prayer. When he comes to "Give us this day our daily bread" he slowly, religiously lowers the knife and cuts twenty stalks. Tying the stalks, which must not be more or less than twenty, the farmer walks home slowly, solemnly, and hangs the bundle above the stove where it remains until the harvest is over. If any member of the family should be ill during harvest-time some of these grains from the "bundle of twenty" are roasted and soaked in water and the liquor given as medicine. It is said that the requirement that the



farmer must not look around while going to the field is to prevent the reapers idly gazing from their work while harvesting is in progress.

Besides the "kitdul" the farmer or sometimes his daughter goes to the rice field the day before the reaping is begun and cuts a few stalks of grain which are carried home as though they were a heavy burden. In some occult way the harvest is made more abundant by the imitative act of carrying big sheaves.

There are many ceremonies connected with the using of the first reaped rice. One is to make "pilipig." This dish is prepared by parching the grains, then pounding them into flour which is mixed with sugar and coconut. The "pilipig," or ceremonial food, must not be tasted until an old woman or man who has a local reputation for performing the ceremony takes a dish of it to the rice-field and holding it on high with both hands, makes offering to the spirit saying: "You people of the north, south, east, and west, here is your share of the harvest. Protect the crop from destruction until it is harvested. Make the next crop grow well. Do not harm the farmers who till the soil. Send them no sickness. Keep them well and strong. Accept your share of the crop with our gratitude for your protection." After the offering to the spirits has been duly made then the "pilipig" is served to the gathered friends. It is thought that the yield will be greater if "pilipig" is offered to many people.

In the provinces of northwest Luzon the custom of making offerings to the spirits is curiously mixed with ancestor worship. In these provinces when the harvest offerings are made the farmers also make offerings to the spirits of their ancestors in gratitude for the land which they have inherited and for protection and aid in securing a crop. Blended with the gratitude is a fear that if the offering is not made to ancestral spirits they will become jealous and work harm to their descendants. In some communities after the rice is garnered a big harvest festival is held in honor of the spirits of ancestors. The offering is placed with many rites under a tree some distance from where the happy farmers are making merry.

Among the many and varied preliminaries the following ceremony inaugurates the harvest in some provinces. A woman with an established reputation for performing the opening of the harvest goes, early, dressed in black to the field the day before the reaping begins. Stopping at a corner of the field she makes sure no one is near, for onlookers would make the ceremony valueless; then she walks around the field on the "pilapil," or dikes that separate the rice paddies. As she walks she repeats a prayer which she finishes when she reaches the place from where she started. From this point she goes direct into the field, making an opening in the standing grain for her passing by bending the stalks from her on either side. A few feet from the border she breaks seven stalks and ties them with straw into a bundle. Then standing very erect she repeats a prayer, placing at the same time, inside the bundle, a cross of coconut leaves which she has brought. This bundle of seven stalks she takes to the owner. The next day at the same hour five, seven, nine reapers (any odd number) go to the field and begin to cut the grain. But before the real work commences, they must each, working in absolute silence, being careful not to expectorate, cut a fair-sized bundle and take it to the place where the seven stalks were cut the day before, and lay it at the roots of the stubble. These lie untouched until the rice is cut. After this solemn performance is over the harvesting with all its merry chaffing and singing may begin.

Harvesters should be happy and laughing, this keeps the grains in good condition. Every one, even the children must be careful not to bite the husk off the rice grains with their teeth. To do this would teach the rats and mice how to eat palay, or unhusked rice after it is put in the granary.

There are innumerable minor superstitions and customs such as: A farmer must not sell rice during harvest; if he does his crop will not last till the next harvest. On Fridays rice or money must be given to all beggars who ask for it. To refuse will bring failure of the next crop. At the first meal eaten of the rice of the new harvest there must be some left in the kettle where the grain is cooked. This makes the next harvest abundant. Rice for food is par-

ticularly well cooked during harvest season as the swelling of the grains affects in like manner the size of the grains of the new harvest. A snake living in a granary is believed to aid in bringing a good yield. The reason that there is more bearded rice raised than non-bearded is that the latter is younger and has not had time to spread over so much of the country.

Filipino farmers have one way of forecasting weather that is, at least, unique. For the first twelve days of the new year a record is kept that foretells, by months, the weather of the whole year. If it is a bright sunshiny day on the first day of January then the whole month, with the exception of the first twelve or indicating days, will be bright and sunshiny. Should the third day of January be rainy then March will be a rainy month and so on for the whole year, the weather of the month being determined by the weather on the day with the corresponding number in January.

There are special days when rain is a good sign or a bad sign. Rain on October 3, November 1, January 1, means a good crop. Rain on October 5 is so sure an indication of crop failure that should it occur many farmers will make no further effort to plant or do more with the crop already planted. On the other hand if it fails to rain on All Saints' Day many farmers will not go ahead with the cultivation of the rice-crop for rain on that day means a good crop.

Some other crop indicators are: good mango crop, poor rice crop; guava just the reverse. If the bamboo has flowers, they mean a shortage in the rice crop. If, on New Year's Eve the cow lows first after the midnight hour it means a good crop, but should the horse neigh or the dog bark before the cow gets in her "moo" failure of crop will result.

There are customs and superstitions connected with the planting of corn, the second staple food crop of the Filipino farmer, though not nearly so many as with rice cultivation. The crop is newer in the Islands, is not so important, nor is it held in such esteem as rice. Many of the superstitions and practices resemble the customs used in rice growing; for example, the planter must eat heartily before planting, and must work quietly so the rats and mice and the spirits will

not be attracted to the seed. Oftentimes planting is done at night so as to escape observation by animals and spirits. As further protection against these marauders a cross with garlic and other vegetables at the foot of it is placed in the cornfields.

Some superstitions, however, are peculiar to corn-planting as: corn should be planted on the odd days of the month. To secure ears of corn with little husk the farmer while planting the corn wears as little clothing as possible; some go almost naked. A woman must not drop seed-corn from an apron or skirt, as this would cause much husk. The planter turns around three times before beginning planting, as this makes three ears on a stalk a sure thing. Smoking should not be indulged in while planting, it will make small ears and small kernels. To eat sugar while planting corn is a good thing as it will make the kernels large and sweet. Chewing buyo makes red kernels. Laughing is prohibited as it makes few grains on the ear because the kernels will be far apart as the lips are in laughing. People with teeth missing are not permitted to plant corn, as there will be missing kernels on the ears.

The Filipino farmer has many beliefs, interesting because of their simplicity, connected with the planting of fruits and vegetables. The few here given are types and illustrate the customs: sour fruits, as the tamarind, may be made sweeter if diluted honey be used to water the plants. Camotes, or sweet potatoes, are much sweeter if the hole for planting be made with a stalk of sugar cane. The banana will bear a big bunch with large fruits if the farmer encircles his head with his arms and then bows low after planting it. Vines growing on the ground, as the squash, are much larger if the planter lies flat on the ground with his arms and legs extended after the completion of his work. If the vines are trained over a frame the farmer hangs bottles on it to secure large fruits. There is a freak coconut that appears occasionally. Its peculiarity is that instead of water inside there is a jelly-like substance. This coconut is called "makapuno" and is a delicacy, a luxury, costing four or five times as much as the ordinary nut. To produce this desir-

able fruit, the planter keeps his mouth full of rice, cooked until very soft, while planting the germinated coconut.

That all farmers in the Philippines are so influenced by superstitious beliefs is far from being true. Agriculture is too far advanced for that and there are educated, fairly well read farmers in touch, at least theoretically, with sensible if not scientific methods of farming. But it is true that a large majority of the tillers of the soil have more confidence in the efficacy of the practices related here than in any new-fangled plows and harrows, seed-selection, germinating tests, fertilizers, and such things advocated by *Americanos*. The farmers have a curiosity about the experiments, demonstrations, and talks by the men from the Bureau of Agriculture, and College of Agriculture and the Farm School teachers, but they feel that the familiar traditional methods are more reliable.